

Jeroen J.H. Dekker, Hilda T.A. Amsing, Lisa Hahurij, Inge Wichgers**The Resilience of Recently Graduated and Unemployed Dutch Academics in Coping with the Economic Crisis**

Some years after the world-wide crisis starting in 2008, also many recently graduated Dutch academics were confronted with the problem of how to cope with getting a job. This article focuses on the coping strategies they use when searching after a job, spending the day, and coping with limited financial means. 91 graduated academics completed a survey and twelve more were interviewed. They exposed remarkable resilience in coping with their situation by using emotional and problem oriented coping strategies. Emotional oriented coping strategies resulted in the graduates being able to put their situation of being without a regular job into perspective, structuring their days rather easily, and being pleased with how they did it. Their problem oriented coping strategies showed willingness to look for a job outside their field of study and below an academic level. Some respondents were willing to do unpaid work to get enrolled in the job market. The rather constructive way of coping can be explained partly by their relatively favourable financial position, mostly due to their temporary or side jobs, which also gave them a way to spend their days. Thus, the recently graduated academic job seekers perceived their economic situation in a rather positive way. Whether this was influenced by their level of education should be an important subject for more research.

Keywords:

coping strategies, unemployment, economic crisis, academics, young adults

1 Introduction

The economic crisis that started in 2008 soon became an extraordinary stress situation for young Europeans in countries like Spain, Portugal, and Greece, countries where the already very high unemployment figures rose to a dramatic level. In the Netherlands, with a much better situation on the eve of the crisis, unemployment rose only slowly, and the job market for academics even seemed not to be sensitive for the influence of the crisis. After some years, however, with the crisis lasting much longer than expected by the government, this changed. From then, also recently graduated Dutch academics were confronted with the problem of how to cope with the challenge of getting a job. They started their study in a still flourishing economy and had reason to expect to get a job rather smoothly after being graduated. Sometimes, as happened in the financial sector, they were

asked to accept a job even before graduation. But in the last few years, the academic diploma no longer was a job guarantee. Apart from rising unemployment figures start salaries for academics diminished; more-over, the number of tenure contracts after one and a half year diminished from 50 percent in 2008 to 25 percent now (Deijkers, Gunst 2013).

Table 1 shows unemployment figures for recently graduated Dutch academics from 2008 until 2011, created by the research center for the labor market of the University of Maastricht (ROA 2012). Apart from regional differences, with in the Northern provinces of Drenthe, Friesland, and Groningen unemployment figures of respectively 15%, 21%, and 9%, and in the rest of the country lower figures from 6% to 8%, also the various academic studies show major differences. High figures can be found in humanities, the social sciences, and law studies, and low figures in health, technics, and science. Economic studies showed low figures in 2011, but with major and still ongoing reorganizations in the banking sector, this situation deteriorated from 2012.

Unemployment figures only tell part of the story. In the health sector, for example, 42% of recently graduated medical specialists who succeeded in getting a job, have no permanent position and thus job uncertainty (Croonen 2013). Indeed, high unemployment is not only an economic, but also an individual welfare problem. Because of less financial means and lower social participation, unemployment can result into less satisfaction about daily life, the circle of friends, and life as such (Van Echtelt 2010). Unemployment also can result in mental health problems, sometimes even depression,

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as we know from Australian research amongst adults (Breslin, Mustard 2003), longitudinal research from the USA (Dooley, Prause, Ham-Rowbottom 2000; Mossakowski 2011), longitudinal research amongst 16 to 21 aged school dropouts from New-Zealand (Fergusson et al. 2001), and longitudinal research among Swedish youngsters (Reine, Novo, Hammerstrom 2004). Also the relationship between unemployment and anxiety disorders and drug abuse (Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey 1997; Fergusson, Horwood, Woodward 2001), smoking (Reine et al. 2004), alcohol abuse (Mossakowski 2008), and criminality (Fergusson et al. 2001) has been pointed out. For Australian New South Wales it has been shown that unemployed youngsters have more mental health problems when unemployment figures are low than when they are high (Scanlan, Bundy 2009). Perhaps because being aware that you are not the only unemployed youngster is making you feel better.

Table 1 : Percentage of unemployment under recently (less than one year) graduated Academics by University sector (ROA 2008, 2010, 2012)

| University sector | Before the economic crisis | | During the economic crisis | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|
| | Average 1996-2008 | 2007 | 2009 | 2011 |
| Agriculture | 5,8 | 6 | 9 | 8 |
| Technology | 2,6 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| Economics | 2,3 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| Health | 3,3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Behaviour and society | 4,8 | 4 | 6 | 9 |
| Humanities | 7,3 | 6 | 8 | 17 |
| Law | 3,4 | 3 | 9 | 10 |
| Science | 3,7 | 4 | 2 | 6 |

But unemployment does not as a matter of course result into such problems. Studies among youngsters from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland report that social exclusion and marginalization are not automatically related to unemployment (Hammer 2000; Hammer 2007). It seems that next to the length of unemployment, also mental health, the level of education, and the strategy of coping with unemployment could be of influence on the consequences of unemployment for youngsters (Hammer 2000). In this article, the focus is on the strategy of coping with unemployment and on the level of education.

Coping theories focus on the ways by which and how people manage problems in their life. Those ways consist in cognitive and behavioural efforts to cope with demands from both the external world and people's own personality (McKee-Ryan, Kinicki 2002). Thus, coping is not simply solving problems. It is the capacity to reduce the stress level of any stress situation caused by demands and problems in one's life course (Morrison & Bennet 2012). In the Netherlands, with the crisis starting as a financial one, and only later on also affecting the job market for academics, it was rather recently that also for recently graduated academics the problem arose of how to cope with the challenge of getting a job. This

challenge soon became one of their most important life challenges, and a major test of their resilience capacities. Next to cope with job search, they also are confronted with the challenge of how to cope with spending a day without a job, and how to tackle possible problems because of limited financial means.

The level of education is addressed by focusing on a specific group of unemployed young Europeans, namely academics. While also unemployment figures for non-academics are rising in the Netherlands during the crisis, the actual crisis is historically unique for academics. The reason why is that never before in Dutch history such a high percentage of young people got higher education and now, with rising unemployment figures (see above) have to find a job on their level of education. Therefore, the research question for this article will turn to the various coping strategies that recently graduated young academics do use when confronted with the necessity of searching after a job, spending the day without a job, and with limited financial means during the present economic crisis.

The next section will look at the theoretical framework of coping with job search, spending the day, and limited financial means. In the third, methodological section, the two methods used, namely the survey and the semi-structured interview, will be explained. The main reason for interviewing people next to the survey was that those semi structured interviews could result into depth research into the coping strategies of the interviewees. In the fourth section, the results will be described for the three selected domains of coping, namely searching for a job, spending the day, and managing limited financial means. In the concluding section, the results will be interpreted, the research question will be addressed, and the limits of the research will be discussed.

2 Coping with the crisis: a theoretical framework

Coping theories focus on the way by which and how people manage problems in their life. In this section, first the main aspects of respectively problem focused and emotion focused coping strategies will be addressed. Then, we will turn to specific coping strategies on the three domains selected for this research, namely job seeking, spending the day without a job, and the challenge of limited financial means. Coping strategies on those domains can tell us more about the degree of resilience that young people show when confronted with unemployment. Although our research turns to recently graduated and unemployed young academics, also coping research results on other groups will be included when necessary.

Coping can be described as a series of cognitive behavioral attempts to manage internal and external demands by referring to sources belonging to one's individual personality (McKee-Ryan, Kinicki 2002). In sum, coping is everything people do to diminish the impact of an experienced stressor and to change negative emotions (Morrison, Bennet 2012). Coping is

based on the idea that people first designate the stress situation as a challenge or a threat, and then use several ways to solve it (McKee-Ryan, Kinicki 2002). The distinction between problem and emotion focused coping, prominent in the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Sulsky, Smith 2005), is often used in research. Problem focused coping turns to radically address the problem, and emotional focused coping tries to manage the emotional reactions on the stressor experienced (McKee-Ryan, Kinicki 2002).

The distinction between those two coping strategies is not always conceptually clear, as was shown in a review of 69 studies on coping (Skinner, Edge, Altman, Sherwood 2002). It seems that coping strategies often could be placed in both categories, while some, for example looking after social support, are difficult to place in either of them. Indeed, coping is more complex and has more functions. Therefore, Skinner and his colleagues proposed to make use of twelve so called coping families, to be placed in three main categories, namely relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Each category consists of two pairs of coping families on both the self and the context level, with some coping families turning out to be more important than others. This operationalization of coping by Skinner et al. was sometimes criticized as unclear and inconsistent (Maybery, Steer, Reupert, Goodyear 2009). Indeed, this twelve families approach is not satisfactory. Therefore, notwithstanding the above discussed conceptual problems with the distinction between problem and emotion focused coping, it seems to be useful to retain the distinction between problem and emotion focused coping. At the same time, it should be taken into consideration that those strategies are first level coping strategies that organize second level strategies, as the majority of the twelve coping families described above are (Folkman, Moskowitz 2004; Maybery et al. 2009).

In the next part of this section we address coping on the three specific domains of coping addressed in this article, namely seeking a job, spending the day, and managing limited financial means. In recent research (Bachman, Baumgarten 2012) into the intensity and the patterns of job seeking, seven search methods are being identified, among them search through the public employment office, through a private employment agency, by direct applications, through friends or relatives, through trade unions, by inserting, studying and answering advertisements, finally through testing, interviewing or examination. Among European countries there exist differences in the use of those methods with Dutch job seekers making slightly less use of informal methods and with both young job searchers in general and academics making less use of the public employment office (Bachman, Baumgarten 2012). The length of being unemployed seems to be related to job search behavior (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, Phillips 1994).

Three models, the sequential, the learning and the emotional ones, could describe changes in job search.

According to the sequential model (Barber et al. 1994) the search starts with a preparation period, after which a more intensive phase follows which will be repeated when necessary. The learning model assumes that job seekers through learning by doing develop more efficient search methods. For this model it also is assumed that with the duration of job search both the use of informal sources and the intensity of searching are increasing (Barber et al. 1994; Saks, Ashforth 2000). Finally, the emotional model assumes that job seekers experience stress or frustration, which could result in escape behavior. For this model the use of informal sources does not increase but decreases because of those sources working as stressors (Barber et al. 1994). For the rest, according to a study into unemployed Europeans of various ages, people who are more than eleven months without a job are searching after a job much less intensively than people who are jobless between six to eleven months (Bachman, Baumgarten 2012). Thus, the length of unemployment seems to be decisive for changing coping behaviour. Furthermore, according to a review of sixteen studies on coping with loss of a job, the personal significance of being without a job could be very different, depending on social support and personal resources as self-esteem and life satisfaction (McKee-Ryan, Kinicki 2002).

The second domain is coping with spending the day. According to a longitudinal study in South Australia on school leavers in the 1980s with increasing unemployment figures with topics on viewing television, doing nothing special, and time spent to hobbies and unpaid activities such as being active in politics, no differences occurred between youngsters becoming unemployed later on and those getting a job. Not surprisingly, later on this changed with unemployed youngsters spending more time on doing nothing special (Winefield, Tiggemann, Winefield 1992; Scanlan, Bundy 2011). Time spent with friends, however, did not differ between these groups. According to research on time spending by Australian students, youngsters with and youngsters without a job, all aged from 18 to 25, unemployed young adults spent more time to the household and to freely-to-spend time by viewing television, using the internet, or just doing nothing. Unemployed women spent more time to sleep and, when being mothers, to care their children than women with a job. For men, in that respect there was no difference. For the rest, activities in spending the day can change a lot and it is difficult to conclude to typical patterns of activities for those youngsters (Scanlan, Bundy 2011). Other Australian studies state that activities as such are not that important; it is the significance people give to them (Scanlan, Bundy, Matthews 2010; Winefield 1993). When people want to do something, or when they have to do it, the effect of that activity on their mental health is more positive than when they do something only because they have nothing to do (Winefield 1993; Scanlan et al. 2010). Another result of studies on



Australian youngsters without a job seems to be that solitary activities are more negatively related to mental health than activities undertaken with other people, while this relation was not found for young adults still on school or having a job (Winefield 1993).

As to the third domain, coping with limited financial means, Dutch youngsters aged up to 27 can get social security after four weeks of unemployment if they can show that finding a job was impossible for them and if their capital is under 5850 Euro ("Bijstandsuitkering" n.d.; "Wanneer heb ik recht op bijstand" n.d). This, however, is not the case in many other countries. Moreover, in the western world poverty and financial deprivation are based on relative criteria instead of absolute ones such as not enough food and no housing in underdeveloped countries. Poverty in the western world is first of all having less than the majority of the population (Kochuyt 2004). About coping with economic deprivation there is not much knowledge available (Waters, Moore 2001). From studies on the relationship between problem focused and emotion focused coping and the impact of again getting a job it seems that in the first stage of unemployment economic deprivation was related negatively to emotion focused coping, but not to problem focused one (Waters & Moore 2001). But with economic deprivation in those studies considered as a global construct, difference in coping strategies could also be the result of various forms of deprivation (Waters, Moore 2001). Studies have been done with the Deakin Coping Scale (Waters, Moore 2001) to assess how Australian unemployed adults cope with economic deprivation. Coping strategies differed from problem solving coping to emotion focused coping. It seems that problem solving coping moderated the impact of economic deprivation on depression and self-esteem while emotion focused coping resulted in the opposite, namely a major impact of unemployment on depression (Waters, Moore 2001).

Studies on reactions by both unemployed and employed people in the Netherlands in the 1980s, also a period of economic crisis, conclude that less-spending strategies for those groups did have similarities like economizing on luxury spending such as holidays, eating out, going out, and not saving on daily food, but also differences with unemployed people postponing payments, saving less, eating into one's saving, and borrowing from friends and family (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau 1989).

Looking at the three above described specific coping strategies from the perspective of the two main general coping strategies, namely problem focused and emotion focused ones it seems to be necessary to better understand the significance of unemployment for an individual human being. Finally, it seems that there exist various relationships between how people cope with seeking a job, spending the day, and managing limited financial means. Less financial means and more financial deprivation could have impact on daily activities of

people in search of a job, for example because they could be hesitating in inviting other people at home (Julkunen 2001), while people who cope effectively with financial deprivation could have more time and more motivation for search after a job. Therefore, the assumed relationships between problem focused coping strategies as to the domain of having less financial means or feeling economically deprived with regard to both looking for a job and with regard to social activities (visiting clubs, meeting friends and family and going out) will be tested in this study.

In the next section, the methodology used in this research, namely survey and semi structured interviews, will be explained.

3 Methodology: survey and semi-structured interviews

3.1 Design and respondents

A mixed method design of both a survey (N=91, 67 female, 19 male, 5 unknown) and semi structured interviews (N=12, 5 female, 7 male) was used. The reason for also interviewing people was that in depth research into the coping strategies of the interviewees was possible. The interviewees were approached by the personal network of the researcher. The survey was carried out among recently graduated academics from different studies (see Table 2) with varying unemployment figures. All respondents are alumni of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands; they are unemployed or have a temporarily or side job, are without an employment history, graduated less than two years ago and are under thirty. The respondents are approached by using social media alumni networks of the University of Groningen, especially LinkedIn, and personal networks.

Table 2: Number of respondents from the different branches of study joining the survey and the interviews

| Branches of study | Survey | Interview |
|-------------------|--------|-----------|
| Science | 8 | 2 |
| Arts & humanities | 6 | 2 |
| Economics | 16 | 2 |
| Medical sciences | 4 | 2 |
| Social sciences | 46 | 2 |
| Law | 11 | 2 |
| Total | 91 | 12 |

3.2 Instruments

For the survey a questionnaire was used consisting of 83 items together with 7 questions that were directed at various background variables of the respondents. The questionnaire covers the three domains studied in this research, namely looking for a job, spending the day, and economic deprivation. For each domain the items cover the problem focused and the emotion focused coping strategies with twelve different categories of activities (see Table 4). The items are based on five existing and valid instruments, namely Coping With Job Loss Scales (Kinicki, Latack 1990), Job Search Behavior Measure (Blau 1994), a questionnaire of Julkunen (2001), the Time Structure Questionnaire (Bond, Feather 1988), finally the

Deakin Coping Scale (Moor 2003). Some new items are included, for example to fit the present day situation in which internet is supposed to play a dominant role in looking for jobs and spending days for unemployed young academics. The items are translated to Dutch and some scales of the original items are adjusted to achieve uniformity within the new questionnaire. After a reliability check on the twelve categories, 21 items were left out of the analysis, which leaves an instrument consisting of 62 items ($\alpha = .60$). In Table 3 the number of final items based on these five instruments is depicted.

Table 3: Number and origin of the items for the domains Looking for a Job, Spending the Day and Economic Deprivation and the reliability of the domains

| | Coping with Looking for a Job | Coping with Spending the Day | Coping with Economic Deprivation | Level of Economic Deprivation |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Items total | 19 | 23 | 13 | 7 |
| Kinicki & Latack (1990) | 5 | - | 2 | - |
| Blau (1994) | 7 | - | - | 3 |
| Julkunen (2001) | - | 4 | - | 4 |
| Bond & Feather (1988) | - | 10 | - | - |
| Moore (2003) | - | - | 5 | - |
| Added | 7 | 9 | 6 | - |
| Scale | 7 points Likert (15) dichotomie (4) | 7 points Likert | 7 point Likert (11) dichotomie (2) | 7 point Likert |
| Cronbach's alpha | .64 | .48 | .64 | .87 |

Within each of the coping domains, categories of activities are distinguished, as can be seen in Table 4. This table also depicts the results of the exploration of the reliability of the instrument used (Cronbach's Alpha), both for the coping strategies themselves as for the categories of activities distinguished.

Table 4 shows that the reliability of some categories and the reliability of the problem focused coping strategy within the domain of Spending the Day is rather low. Some of the items within these categories, however, are relevant for our research. Therefore, it was decided to explore these data on item level instead of on category level. Also some other items that were excluded from subscales, but which are nonetheless of importance, for example in relation to the data of the interviews, are explored on item level. For the semi structured interviews the same topics covered by the items of the questionnaire are used. But the interviewer also could ask the respondents to describe their behaviors, motives and emotions. The interviews are transliterated and analyzed by using Atlas.ti.

Table 4: Reliability of strategies and categories within the three domains

| Domain | Coping strategy | Cronbach's Alpha | Category of activities | Cronbach's Alpha |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Looking for a Job | Problem focused coping | .73 | Preparation | .60 |
| | | | Active search | .60 |
| | Emotion focused coping | .61 | Regulating emotions | .61 |
| Spending the Day | Problem focused coping | .38 | Leisure/private | .48 |
| | | | Unpaid/nonstructural work | .22 |
| | Structuring the day | .74 | | |
| | Emotion focused coping | .77 | Feeling meaningful | .89 |
| | Present day orientation | .62 | | |
| | Effective organization | .77 | | |
| | | | | |
| Economic Deprivation | Problem focused coping | .70 | Financial control | .60 |
| | | | Generating money | .41 |
| | Social support | .48 | | |
| | Emotion focused coping | .62 | Positive attitude | .62 |

4. Results

4.1 Coping with looking for a job

For the domain of Looking for a Job, the means and standard deviations of both the coping strategies and the underlying categories of activities as found in the survey are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations of the four components in the domain Looking for a Job (7-point Likert Scale)

| Coping Strategy | M | SD | Category of activities | M | SD |
|------------------------|------|-----|------------------------|------|-----|
| Problem focused coping | 3.29 | .71 | Preparation | 3.58 | .71 |
| | | | Active Search | 3.00 | .89 |
| Emotion focused coping | 4.50 | .89 | Regulating emotions | 4.50 | .89 |

1= never, 2= less than once in month, 3= once a month, 4= 2 to 3 times a month, 5= weekly, 6= 2 to 4 times a week, 7= 5 times a week or more

From Table 5 we can conclude that alumni in the survey frequently use emotion focused strategies for dealing with the domain of looking for work. This means that they try to put into perspective their situation of being in search for a job. They tell themselves that they are not the only people in the world who are looking for a job ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.2$) or that being unemployed is not a hopeless position ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.7$). Although the

youngsters who participated in this research had a successful school career, the job with which they also hoped starting also a working career is not available. One of the interviewees (historian, male) expressed this as follows:

“This is an awareness I now have had for several months. I honestly did hit my head to the wall, sure and had been frustrated and sad. Well, not really sad, but... I don’t know. You discover your own limitations when things are not working. Actually, things went well, I never had to put much effort for that, and now that is different”.

It was supporting for the interviewees to realize that they were not an exception:

“Look, if everybody around me would have succeeded in finding a job, than I might have felt not at ease, like, shit, I really need to find a job. At this moment this is not the case and I feel like that it apparently is very difficult to find a job and to enter the job market. So, yes, that comforts me” (economist, male).

Although most of the interviewees tried to remind themselves that other things like their health and their social network are more important than not getting a job, four out of ten interviewees explicitly mentioned the importance of work, emphasizing its significance for their personal development: “(...) it is important and forms a crucial part of my development. It is not just the work itself, but to continue your own development, to continue learning, to have new experiences, to meet new people” (human movement scientist, male). Some interviewees worried about their opportunities: “we are from the generation that always ends up in between things and that makes you think it is quite shitty” (psychologist, female). Most of the interviewees, however, were positive about their chances on the condition that they kept on trying: “I think eventually it will work out fine, I am convinced it will. But I think I have to become actively involved” (human movement scientist, male, who applied for social security).

When we look at problem focused coping strategies and consider the kind of activities the respondents in the survey undertook in preparing their entry to the job market, the survey results show that the respondents regularly, almost weekly, talked to friends or relatives about possible clues for finding a job ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.1$); that they looked for jobs on the internet several times a week ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 1.05$) and that they sent letters of application several times a month ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 1.32$).

In the interviews looking for jobs on the internet also was popular. It was done by all respondents; even more, the internet was the only medium used for none of the interviewees used printed media. Most respondents always used the same sites, such as “Monsterboard” or the “Nationale Vacaturebank” [National Job Vacancy

Site]. Another way of trying to find a job is by getting work experience in an unpaid training position. From the survey it appears that a number of respondents followed that course, although a broad variety characterized the way they responded to this item ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 2.06$). Some interviews showed fundamental objections towards an unpaid training position:

“It is a bit against my principles, because I believe that already during your Master training you have to do a lot of work for which people normally get paid for. I should become concerned if all graduates should to do unpaid work for another year to get working experience” (biologist, male, social welfare).

Others respondents changed their mind about an unpaid training position:

“In the beginning I did not want to do that. I am graduated now, which took me quite some time and I now want to earn some money. But I start to reach a point where I think that it might be necessary for entering a company or creating a network. Yes, and if it is unpaid, so be it. If it helps me to reach a job, yes. I think it is almost beginning to get a prerequisite to do it that way” (human movement scientist, male, applied for social welfare).

Next to the items measured by the 7 points Likert Scales, 4 dichotomous items were included to study coping behavior with looking for a job, see Table 6.

Table 6: Percentages dichotomous items on looking for work, Problem focused coping

| Item | Agree | Disagree |
|---|----------|----------|
| Being registered as looking for work (preparation) | 30 (33%) | 60 (66%) |
| Looking for a job outside my field of study (active search) | 63 (69%) | 27 (30%) |
| Looking for work below my level of study (active search) | 71 (78%) | 20 (22%) |
| Starting a company of my own (active search) | 20 (22%) | 70 (77%) |

Only a minority of the alumni were registered at the national employment office, the UWV, which supports the unemployed to find a job and to receive social security. The reason why was that many of the respondents had a temporarily job. Table 6 shows that the respondents are rather pragmatic in their job search. While completing an academic study, a majority of them was also looking for jobs outside their field of study or for jobs at a lower level.

The interviewees considered a job on the level of “higher professional education” (HBO), usually understood as just below academic level, as non-problematic. Some of them even considered a job at secondary professional level (MBO), on a much lower level than



academic jobs, as a reasonable option. Others, however, did not:

“I do not feel like selling newspapers on the street or selling subscriptions. (...) Then I would rather borrow something of my parents. That is a matter of pride. Maybe I am too proud. (...) Maybe I need not to clown around and just do things like that. But on this moment, I think I would get unhappy if I did” (human movement scientist, male, applied for social welfare).

A substantial amount of 22 percent of the respondents in the survey is starting a company (see Table 6). The interviews show that one of the reasons for doing this is becoming independent from the supply of vacant positions: “Just being dependent is very frustrating. Dependent on the supply of positions. And on the competition. You just cannot control it” (communication specialist, female).

4.2 Coping with spending the day

We also asked the respondents how they spent and structured their days and how they felt about this. Many respondents worked in a temporarily job or a side job, some on a full time basis. That made them earn a living, stay independent, but also have a purposeful way of spending the day. One of the interviewees working in a distribution centre explains this as follows:

“If I would not have this temporarily job or temporarily earnings, I would have to move back to my parents, because I would not be able to pay my room’s rent anymore. And I very much would like to stay in Groningen. And besides, although the job is not really fun, it is simply nice to have a purpose during weekdays, to have a kind of routine”.

Table 7, on the results of the survey regarding spending the day, shows that respondents are rather positive about the way they structure their days, but rather neutral on the items regarding the way they handle their situation emotionally.

The respondents indicate that reading, playing on the computer, watching television, doing sports and doing domestic work were regular activities for them. But they almost never were active in politics or fulfilled caring tasks. The interviewees told us that watching television and using the computer was often performed at the same time. Although doing these two activities varied from one respondent to another, most interviewees mentioned a duration of two hours a day. The interviewees reported an increase in their time spent to domestic work due to their situation of unemployment: “You just go to the supermarket more easily to get lunch, or you cook more extensively. You have more time for cleaning, so yes, probably you do that more tedious” (economist, male, applied for social welfare). Another interviewee (human movement scientist, male) about

domestic work: “Because of being bored? Yes, maybe. There are not so many things to do, so then you spend more time on these things”. In the interviews most respondents kept on doing sports, or even increased the time set aside for sport: “Usually I go to the gym when I have nothing else to do. After sport my head is clear again and then I can move on” (human movement scientist, male).

Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations of the four components in the domain Spending the Day (7-point Likert Scale)

| Coping Strategy | M | SD | Category of activities | M | SD |
|------------------------|-------|------|-----------------------------|-------|------|
| Problem focused coping | 3.79* | .48* | Leisure/private** | 4.45* | .71* |
| | | | Unpaid/nonstructural work** | 1.69* | .72* |
| | | | Structuring the day*** | 4.82 | 1.34 |
| Emotion focused coping | 3.42 | .98 | Feeling meaningful*** | 4.51 | 1.51 |
| | | | Present day orientation*** | 2.88 | 1.16 |
| | | | Effective organization*** | 4.68 | 1.59 |

* Cannot be considered as reliable subscales, analyses on item level required.

** 1= never, 2= less than once in month, 3= once a month, 4 = 2 to 3 times a month, 5= weekly, 6= 2 to 4 times a week, 7= 5 times a week or more

*** 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= slightly disagree, 4 = neutral, 5= slightly agree, 6= agree, 7= strongly agree

Results from both the survey and the interviews let see that respondents try to be effective in spending their time (category of activities “Structuring the day”) by starting to use their alarm clock and so to get up early (M= 5.25, SD=1.65, meaning slightly agree on “I use my alarm clock every day”). The interviewees told us that they did not need an urgency to do that: “I try to not be too late in the evening, because I want to stick to the routine of getting up early” (biologist, male, rejects social welfare). The respondents in the survey also tend to agree with “I plan my activities in a fixed pattern” (M= 4.44, SD= 1.65) and “I have a fixed schedule” (M= 4.78, SD= 1.7). For one of the interviewees this is the reason he did not watch television during the day: “I consider watching television at daytime as being rather stupid actually, it makes me feel bad”.

The emotion focused coping strategies refer to items that indicate that the respondents feel comfortable with the way they use their time. They slightly disagreed with notions as “I feel like my life is meaningless at the moment” (M= 3.54, SD= 1.94) or “I feel like the way I spend my time is of little use” (M= 3.42, SD= 1.56). From the interviews we know that respondents when not knowing what to do deliberately filled their time: “If I do not know what to do for an afternoon, than I very deliberately start calling people or something in order to



get out of that situation" (biologist, male, receiving social welfare). Thus, it seems that the respondents are successful in filling their days. Yet, some of them wonder if the way they live their lives at the moment is really fulfilling: "I think I do not use my time for the benefit of the common good. It is just about small things now" (historian, male).

The respondents on the survey are not concentrating on the present (rather low Present day orientation) for they (slightly) agree on the items "I think about how my future would look like" ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.45$) and "I day dream about the future" ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.28$). All interviewees frequently thought about their future, especially about the kind of job they would like to get. Some are wondering whether or not they would achieve the kind of job they had in mind, like the alumnus who graduated in economics and who is now aware of the fact that he cannot be too demanding: "It is not like you do not have any clue about your future, but you are just curious where you will end up. There are so many possibilities and you are not totally in control. The job market is not like 'this is what I want to do'" (economist, male). Others assume it will work out just fine: "I have many friends in their thirties who only recently got jobs they feel happy about, so I just take the time I need to find out what I really want and to explore my talents" (historian, male).

4.3 Coping with economic deprivation

To explore the way respondents cope with economic deprivation, first, the level of economic deprivation was determined. The scale "Level of Economic Deprivation" ($\alpha = .87$) consists of two subscales: Financial need and Material deprivation. The subscale Financial need ($\alpha = .83$) consisted of items such as "it is difficult to finance more than basic needs" and "in order to have a desired standard of living, I need to raise my basic income". The subscale material deprivation ($\alpha = .86$) consisted of items such as "I can afford necessary clothing" and "I am able to pay the rent in time". The items are measured from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.

Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations and Cronbach's Alpha for the subscales within Level of economic deprivation (7-point Likert Scale)

| | Cronbach's Alpha | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------|------------------|----------|-----------|
| Financial need | .83 | 3.19 | 1.80 |
| Material deprivation | .86 | 5.29 | 1.47 |

The scales as depicted in Table 8 are adjusted in a way that a high score means a positive attitude (so a low level of experiencing economic deprivation). We can conclude that the respondents do not feel materially deprived, although they would like to be in a better position financially. They tend to slightly agree with notions as "it is difficult to finance more than basic needs" and to slightly disagree with "With my current income I can live the life I want". From this it seems that they do not experience severe economic problems. Also the inter-

viewees do not report severe economic problems, but some report to be careful with their spending behavior. Only two of them sometimes have a negative bank account, the others never have. The reason for this relative welfare is mostly to be found in their temporarily jobs. Also the respondents from the survey in majority did not have social welfare. One of the interviewees was married with a partner who had a job and supported her financially; another respondent used her saving money. Nevertheless most of them longed for more financial space and this was one of the reasons to look for a job fitting their diploma: "I can really look forward to the moment I have a job and a steady, and hopefully a decent, income. Then I can just spend my money more easily" (economist, male, no social welfare).

Table 9: Means and Standard Deviations of the four components in the domain Economic deprivation (7 point Likert-Scale)

| Coping Strategy | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Category of activities | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Problem focused coping | 3.14 | .83 | Financial control | 5.43 | 1.24 |
| | | | Generating money | 2.75* | 1.04* |
| | | | Social support | 2.13* | .91* |
| Emotion focused coping | 3.58 | 1.63 | Positive attitude | 3.58 | 1.63 |

*Cannot be considered as reliable subscales, analyses on item level required.

1= never, 2= once in a quarter at the most, 3= twice a quarter, 4 = monthly, 5= 2 to 3 times a month, 6= weekly, 7= more than once a week

Table 9 depicts the means and standard deviations of Problem focused and Emotion focused coping strategies and the relevant categories of activities and shows that both Problem focused and Emotion focused strategies were used regarding economic deprivation. Financial control, including controlling budget and considering ways of saving money, had a high score. Respondents reported that they performed this behavior nearly weekly. All interviewees tried to save money regarding groceries, but some of them also on trips, transport and energy consumption. Only one of them used a cashbook.

To generate money, respondents in the survey reported several strategies such as buying second hand goods ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.48$) and selling second hand goods ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.42$), and saving money ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.93$). The social support these respondents got did not so much include getting money from others (borrowing money from friends scored only $M = 1.06$, $SD = .36$ and borrowing money from family scored $M = 1.60$, $SD = 1.24$), for they seldom asked for financial support ($M = 1.25$, $SD = .87$), but included talking about their financial situation to others ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.82$). Four (out of ten) interviewees reported that they bought or sold things on the internet. One of them, a biologist (male, receiving social welfare), started refurbish bicycles: "So I did think



about it, like, I have lots of time now. I had quite a lot of rubbish in the shed. So, if I was able to fix and sell it, that might be a good idea. That way I am busy and I succeed in raising my income with hundred to hundred-and-fifty euro's".

The interviewees also were asked about getting money from others. Most of them did not lean or borrow money from others, with one exception, namely from their parents. Several interviewees got or borrowed money from their parents, while others said they did not try to avoid it, but that they could ask their parents for financial support if needed.

The emotion coping strategy included two items: "Approaching the financial situation as a challenge" and "Looking at the financial situation from a bright side". In line with the already mentioned result that the respondents in the survey are controlling their budget, they approached their financial situation as a challenge ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.98$). In line with the fact that they are not severely economically deprived (although they would like to have more money), they evaluated their financial situation in a positive way ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.86$). In the interviews one of the respondents (jurist, female, having a temporarily job) expressed her feelings towards her financial position as follows: "It is a good thing to find out how you need to spend money, to know your responsibilities, to set priorities".

4.4 Relations between economic deprivation and respectively job searching activities and social activities

As indicated in section 2, on the theoretical framework, we assumed a relationship between respectively 1. Feeling economically deprived relates to problem focused coping strategies with regard to looking for a job; and 2. Feeling economically deprived relates to social activities (visiting clubs, meeting friends and family and going out).

Table 10 shows the correlations between the level of economic deprivation (including Financial need and Material deprivation) and Problem focused coping.

Table 10: Pearson Correlation of economic deprivation and Problem focused coping of Looking for Work

| | Preparation | | Active search | | Problem focused | |
|----------------------|-------------|-----|---------------|-------|-----------------|------|
| | R | P | R | P | R | P |
| Economic deprivation | -.06 | .59 | -.34 | .00** | -.25 | .03* |

* $p < 0.05$ (bilateral). ** $p < 0.01$ (bilateral).

From Table 10 we can conclude that there indeed is a significant relation between the level of experienced Economic Deprivation and Problem focused coping strategies ($p < 0.05$), more specifically, between Economic Deprivation and the activities of Active search (calling potential employers concerning a vacant position, having a job interview, open applications, presenting yourself as a job applicant and sending a letter of application).

Table 11: Pearson Correlation of economic deprivation and Problem focused coping of Looking for Work

| | Meeting friends | | Meeting family | | Going out | | Clubs | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|-----|-----------|-----|-------|-----|
| | R | P | R | P | R | P | R | P |
| Economic deprivation | .17 | .12 | .13 | .26 | .16 | .15 | .09 | .40 |

From Table 11, however, we can conclude that there are no significant relations between experienced economic deprivation and social activities.

5 Conclusion and discussion

The graduates in this research exposed remarkable resilience in coping with their situation of being in search for a job during the economic crisis. This study was focused on three specific coping domains, namely seeking a job, spending the day, and coping with limited financial means. The graduates studied used both emotional and problem oriented coping strategies to deal with the situation. Regarding their problem solving strategies we see that they preferred a rather pragmatic attitude. We saw willingness to look for a job outside their specific field of study and below an academic level of study. Also, we saw, but not for everybody, a certain willingness to do unpaid work as a mean to get enrolled in the job market. This pragmatic attitude cannot be explained as a sign of desperation: doing everything because of being desperate. On the contrary, the respondents seem rather successful in putting their situation of being without a regular job into perspective. We also saw that the respondents are structuring their days rather easily, and, furthermore, that they are pleased with the way they do this.

The rather constructive way of dealing with the situation might be explained partly by their financial position. That position might be different from graduates in countries with higher unemployment figures and without an adequate social security safety net. In the present case, respondents were not severely economically deprived and that was mostly due to their temporarily or side jobs, apparently available for them, and which gave them, besides financial means, also a way to spend their days. The reason why temporarily or side jobs were possible seems to be that those academics could operate both on their own level job market and on job markets below that level. Thus, perhaps surprisingly, the recently academic job seekers from this study evaluated their economic situation in a rather positive way and even regarded it as a challenge. The way they experienced their financial position is significantly related to strategies of active search for a job, but not to their social activities. That means that they undertook social activities regardless of their experienced economic deprivation.

Although, however, for the young academics themselves, unemployment seems to be a problem they can cope with, it still remains a serious problem for the Dutch state that invested in their studies. While trained at an



academic level, graduates perform otherwise when entering the job market on a (much) lower level. This development could even affect academic education as such. It might result in less youngsters entering academic education or also in universities being tempted to adapt their curriculum to the more practical competencies youngsters need in their (lower) future jobs. These questions urge for the evaluation of long term effects of coping strategies of youngsters on university education.

Whether or not higher education was of influence of a higher resilience level was not comparatively studied in this research. But it seems that the opportunities of academics in operating on the job market both on and below their own level and thus in earning their money were of substantial influence in giving them a high resilience degree. That option, however, is not possible for job seekers in times of crisis with a lower level of education. In the Netherlands, recently new policy is formulated to stimulate people with trouble in fulfilling a regular job because of impairments to enter the regular job market. Until now, however, those people had subsidized jobs in a protective environment (*Wijziging van de Wet werk en bijstand*, 2014). While being situated at the bottom of the job market, they, when ending up unemployed, are expected to be far less resilient than academics. They probably will be economically deprived and have problems spending their days. For what seems to be a main protective mechanism for the academics, namely the option of having a side job or a job below their level of education, is not available for them. And indeed, from our literature review we know that not having this option can result in less satisfaction about daily and social life and mental health problems, among them anxiety disorders, depression, and drug abuse. A systematic comparison of the group studied with a group of unemployed lower educated young people should be an important subject for more research about the relationship between resilience and the level of education of unemployed people.

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Wijziging van de Wet werk en bijstand, de Wet sociale werkvoorziening, de Wet werk en arbeidsondersteuning



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